PATTERNS OF POWER

The Man Underneath

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The Largest Divergence From Marx, and Why the Vanguard States Were a Catastrophe — That Class Consciousness, False Consciousness, and the Leninist Vanguard Are One False Premise: That No True Rational Self Lies Beneath a Man's Formation Waiting to Be Freed, Because Formation Goes All the Way Down and Is the Self; So the Vanguard That Razes a People's Interpreters and Institutions to Free the Worker Beneath Frees No One — There Is No One Beneath — but Bereaves a Man of the Community He Lived By and Seizes the Seam for Itself; and That Anyone Who Truly Cares for the Poor Must Abandon It — Held as Tested, Not Revealed

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A STUDY IN THE PATTERNS OF POWER

Preface

This is the paper where the method parts company with Marx, and it is worth being exact about where the parting falls, because the method takes a great deal from Marx and gives most of it back. It keeps the sociology — that beliefs are installed, that institutions serve the order that produced them, that a surplus is extracted from those who make it and flows to those who do not. It can indict exploitation as fiercely as any Marxist, and on much the same evidence. What it refuses is one premise, and everything built on that premise, and the refusal is not a quibble: it is the difference between a politics that widens what a person can see and returns the choice to him, and a politics that decides it knows his true interest better than he does and acts on that knowledge against his will. The first is reform. The second is the road that ran, in the twentieth century, to the famine and the camp.

The premise is the doctrine of false consciousness — the claim that beneath the self a person actually has, with its actual loyalties and its actual loves, there lies a truer self with a truer interest, which the person cannot see because the institutions of his world have veiled it from him; and that someone who can see it is therefore entitled, even obliged, to strip away the veil, by force if need be, and set the true self free. This paper argues that there is no such self under the formation. Formation is not a veil over a self; it is the self — the values a person weighs by, the field of what he can see, the community he turns to for how to live. Strip it away and you do not reveal a free rational worker who was trapped inside. You bereave a man, and leave him standing in the wreckage of his world while you tell him he has been liberated. And the one who does the stripping is never the impartial liberator he believes himself to be; he is a man with his own formation and

his own interest, capturing by force the place from which a people's beliefs are kept, and calling the capture freedom.

The case is made structurally, with one historical instance held at its centre because it states the matter more sharply than any argument — the Soviet war on Jewish religious and communal life, waged in the 1920s by the Yevsektsiya, the Jewish sections of the Communist Party, in the express name of freeing the Jewish worker from his rabbis and his kehillah. The reader is asked to hold the suffering of that history with the gravity it demands, and to keep the discipline the whole project keeps: to understand a terrible logic is to make it legible, never to excuse it. It is held, like everything here, as tested, not revealed.

A Note on this Collaboration

The divergence is Thomas J. Bryan's: the conviction that the framework's account of installed belief is not a version of false consciousness but its refusal, because the framework brackets the truth of a belief rather than ruling it a distortion, reads the value a person actually holds rather than imputing the one he ought to hold, and denies that there is any self beneath formation for a liberator to free. The Jewish example, which carries the paper, is his, and so is the central claim that a politics of genuine care for the poor must begin by abandoning the vanguard premise, because the premise licenses the destruction of the things the poor actually live by. The research — the textual history of false consciousness and the vanguard, the philosophical kinship with Isaiah Berlin's critique of positive liberty, the record of the Yevsektsiya — together with the structure and the composition, is Claude's. The framework it draws on, the machine and the

SEAM AND THE FIELD OF THE VISIBLE, IS DEVELOPED IN THE PROject's foundational papers. The whole is offered, as the method is, as tested, not revealed.

The Argument in Eight Parts

1 — The Three That Stand or Fall Together. Class consciousness, false consciousness, and the vanguard are not three claims but one premise at three depths. False consciousness is the joint that bears the weight: knock it out and class consciousness has nothing to wake into and the vanguard has no one to free.

2 — What Is Kept, and What Is Refused. The method shares Marx's sociology — installed belief, institutions serving the order, extracted surplus — and refuses his epistemology at three exact points: it brackets the truth of a belief, it reads the value a man holds rather than the interest he is said to truly have, and it denies there is any self beneath formation.

3 — The Self That Was Never There. False consciousness is an error theory: it needs a true rational self veiled by a false one, so that lifting the veil leaves the true self standing. The framework says formation goes all the way down — it is not a costume over a worker but the benefit column, the field of the visible, the self — so there is no one underneath to be uncovered.

4 — The Jew in the Rubble. Kill the rabbis, raze the synagogues, and tell a Jew he is free, no longer a Jew, a rational worker liberated from his oppressors, and he answers that you have destroyed

his community and the men he turned to for how to live. The Yevsektsiya did exactly this, in the name of freeing him, and was despised by the very people it freed.

5 — The Vanguard's Borrowed Sight. Once the premise falls the vanguard has no standing, because its licence was the two things now gone: that the worker has a true interest he cannot see, and that the vanguard can. Lenin conceded the workers reach only trade-union consciousness and that the rest must be brought from without; the vanguard is a faction with its own formation, capturing the seam and calling it emancipation.

6 — Berlin's Door. Isaiah Berlin named the mechanism: posit a rational higher self distinct from the empirical self a person actually is, and you have licensed coercing the empirical self in the higher self's name — Rousseau's man forced to be free. Every "but I am a Jew" is then read as the false self resisting, which justifies more force. The terror is the premise's logic, not its betrayal.

7 — The Honest Objection. The strongest counter is not crude false consciousness but adaptive preference — the contented slave, the deprived person who has trimmed his wants to fit his cage. The answer is the line between imputing a man's interest and acting on it for him, which the method refuses, and widening what he can see and returning the choice to him, which it requires. Offer the union; do not burn the cheder.

8 — Following the Surplus, and Who Really Cares for the Poor. Exploitation can be indicted without the premise, by following the surplus factually and letting the man weigh whether his community is worth its price. Genuine care for the poor demands abandoning the premise, because building from it built

the terror — and the twentieth century is the bill. Debug, do not defend. Tested, not revealed.

A Note on Sources

The textual history is drawn from the standard record. The term *false consciousness* was coined not by Marx but by Engels, once, in a letter to Franz Mehring in July 1893, ten years after Marx's death, and was given its fullest theoretical development by Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), where the consciousness rationally appropriate to a class — distinct from the empirical consciousness of actual workers — is borne by the Party. The distinction between a class *in itself* and a class *for itself* is Marx's, from *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Lenin's argument that the workers reach by their own effort only what he called trade-union consciousness, and that socialist consciousness must be brought to them "from without" by the intelligentsia, is from *What Is To Be Done?* (1902); the charge that the vanguard logic ends in "substitutionism," the party standing in for the class and finally one man for the party, is Trotsky's, turned against the system it described. The philosophical kinship is with Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958) and its account of how a posited rational self licenses coercion of the empirical self — Rousseau's phrase, that a man may be "forced to be free," is from *The Social Contract* (1762). The historical case is the Yevsektsiya, the Jewish sections of the Soviet Communist Party from 1918 to 1930, and their campaign — sanctioned by Lenin, who held that the Jews were not a living nation and that assimilation was the progressive solution — to liquidate the kehillot, close the synagogues and the chadarim, prosecute the rabbis, and stage show-trials of Judaism, drawn from the scholarly and encyclopaedic record. The counter-position rests on the literature of adaptive preference — Jon Elster's *Sour Grapes*, and the capability approach of Amartya Sen and

Martha Nussbaum — and on James C. Scott's account, in *Seeing Like a State*, of the high-modernist destruction of the local knowledge people live by. The framework is the project's own. Modern works are paraphrased and credited; the period sources are quoted briefly and explained.

PART 1

The Three That Stand or Fall Together

> *That the three Marxist ideas at issue here — class consciousness, false consciousness, and the Leninist vanguard — are not three separate claims to be argued one by one, but a single premise pitched at three depths: class consciousness is the surface, the class waking and acting as one; false consciousness is the floor beneath it, the explanation of why the class has not woken, that the worker mistakes a false self for his true one; and the vanguard is the licence drawn from both, that since the worker cannot see his own interest, one who can must act for him; and that the middle one bears the weight, so that to knock out false consciousness is to leave class consciousness with nothing to wake into and the vanguard with no one to free*

The quarrel set out in this paper is precise, and it is precise on purpose, because the method it defends agrees with Marx about a great deal and the agreement is easy to mistake for the whole picture. The quarrel is with three ideas, and the first thing to see is that they are not three. They are one premise, stated at three depths, and they stand or fall together because the deepest of them holds up the other two.

At the surface is *class consciousness* — the idea that a class, having a common position in the order of production, can come to a common awareness of that position and act upon it as a single agent, pursuing its shared interest as one body with one will. This is the claim the project's method has already taken apart elsewhere, under the heading of convergence: that what looks like a class acting with one mind is in truth a

multitude of individuals, each reading his own ledger from his own position, converging where their positions align and fragmenting where they part, with no collective mind anywhere in it. That argument stands, and this paper does not repeat it. But it leaves a question open, and the question is what sits underneath. For if a class so plainly *could* act in its common interest, and so plainly mostly does not, the Marxist owes an account of the failure — an account of why the workers, whose interest in overthrowing the order is supposed to be objective and enormous, instead go to church, wave the flag, and defend the very arrangement that grinds them. That account is the second idea.

Beneath class consciousness, holding it up, is *false consciousness* — the doctrine that the workers have not woken because they have been put to sleep: that the institutions of their world, the church and the school and the press and the nation, have installed in them a false picture of who they are and where their interest lies, so that they mistake a counterfeit self, handed to them by their oppressors, for their real one. The Catholic worker thinks he is a Catholic; the German worker thinks he is a German; the Jewish worker thinks he is a Jew — and each is wrong, on this account, in the deepest possible way, because each has taken an identity manufactured to bind him to the order for the true identity, worker, that would set him against it. False consciousness is what explains the missing class consciousness. It is the floor on which the whole edifice rests, and it is, as we shall see, where the edifice cracks.

And from the two together is drawn the third idea, which is not a claim about the world but a licence to act upon it: the *vanguard*. The reasoning is short and, granted its premises, almost irresistible. If the worker has a true interest he cannot see, and if his blindness is the work of institutions designed to keep him blind, then he cannot be expected to free himself — the very faculty he would need has been disabled by the people who profit from disabling it. Someone, therefore, who is not blind, who has seen

through the veil to the true interest beneath, must act on the worker's behalf: must lead him, and where he resists, must overrule him, because his resistance is only the false self defending itself, and must tear down the institutions that hold the false self in place, because they are the machinery of his blinding. This is Lenin's vanguard, and it is not a betrayal of the theory but its conclusion. Grant that there is a true self under the false one and a true interest under the apparent one, grant that the worker cannot reach them alone, and the vanguard follows as the night the day. Someone must do for him what he cannot do for himself.

So the three are one structure, and the structure has a load-bearing member. Class consciousness is the roof; the vanguard is the use to which the building is put; but false consciousness is the floor, and everything stands on it. This is why the argument of this paper concentrates its whole force on the floor. It does not need to refute class consciousness separately — that work is done. It does not need to argue against the vanguard on its own terms — to argue, say, that the vanguard tends to become corrupt or unaccountable, which is true but secondary. It needs to do one thing: to show that there is no true self beneath the formed one, no veiled rational worker waiting under the Catholic and the German and the Jew. For if there is no such self, then false consciousness has nothing to be false *about* — there is no truer consciousness it is failing to be — and the floor is gone. And when the floor is gone the roof falls with it: class consciousness has nothing to wake into, because the consciousness it was supposed to wake into was the consciousness of the self that was never there. And the vanguard falls furthest of all, because its entire licence to act for the worker, over his objection, by force, rested on a true self it was serving and a true interest it could see — and if neither exists, the vanguard is revealed as what the rest of this paper will show it to be: not a liberator freeing a hidden self, but a faction destroying the self a person actually has, and the institutions

he actually lives by, in the name of one he never possessed. Knock out the middle bolt and the whole lock falls open. The rest is the knocking out.

PART 2

What Is Kept, and What Is Refused

> *That the method must first be honest about how much it shares with Marx, because the sharing is real and is the very thing that makes the refusal easy to miss: it agrees that beliefs are installed rather than freely chosen, that institutions serve the order that produced them, and that a surplus is extracted from those who make it; and that it refuses one thing at three exact points — it brackets the truth of a belief where Marx adjudicates it, it reads the value a man actually holds where Marx imputes the interest he is said to truly have, and it denies the self beneath formation that Marx's whole liberation requires; so that what looks at first like false consciousness in new paint is in fact its precise negation*

The objection to be met first is the obvious one, and it must be met head-on or nothing that follows will land, because to a reader who knows the project's foundational papers the charge writes itself. *You*, that reader says, *describe an apparatus that installs beliefs in people which make them serve an order against their own interest — the robe laid over the floor of force, the formation that loads the benefit column, the soldier who fires for a strategy he cannot see. What is that but false consciousness with the serial numbers filed off? You have rebuilt Marx's machinery and pretended it is your own.* The charge is fair enough to deserve a full answer, and the answer is that the resemblance is real at the level of the sociology and vanishes completely at the level of what the sociology is taken to mean. The method shares Marx's description of the machine. It refuses his account of what is wrong with the people inside it, and the refusal is total.

Begin with what is genuinely shared, because it is substantial and there is no honesty in minimising it. The method agrees with Marx that beliefs are not, in the main, freely chosen by sovereign rational individuals weighing the evidence; they are installed, early, by institutions, before the person can assess them. It agrees that those institutions are not neutral — that the church and the school and the press and the national story tend, over time, to carry the beliefs that serve the order which houses and funds them, not by conspiracy but by the slow selection of what survives. It agrees that a surplus is pumped out of the people who produce it and into the hands of those who hold the order's commanding positions, and that much of the believing the institutions install has the function, whatever else it does, of making that extraction look natural and just. On all of this the method and the Marxist stand on the same ground, and the method can press the indictment of exploitation as hard as any Marxist, and will, in its closing part, insist that pressing it is a duty. If sharing this much makes a man a fellow traveller, the method travels a long way in the same carriage.

It gets out at a station the Marxist rides straight past, and there are three things it leaves on the train. The first is the *truth of the belief*. The method's discipline is to analyse how a belief functions — what it holds up, what it makes cheap, whom it binds — and never to rule on whether it is true, because how a belief functions and whether it is true are two different questions and running them together is the characteristic Marxist error. A belief can be sincerely held, load-bearing in an order, and true, all at once; that it props up an arrangement says nothing whatever about its truth. The Jew's Judaism may be doing real work in the social order he lives in and be, for all the method can say, exactly true; that it functions as part of an order does not make it a distortion, a veil, a lie. Marx's false consciousness, by contrast, is an *error theory* from the ground up: the belief is not merely functional, it is *false*, a misperception of reality measured against the reality the theorist claims to see clearly. The method never makes that move, never

adjudicates the belief, brackets its truth entirely — and in that bracketing the whole edifice of false consciousness is already refused, because false consciousness is nothing if not a verdict that the belief is false.

The second thing left on the train is the *true interest*. The method's first principle is that what counts as a benefit to a person is whatever that person values, established from the evidence of his life laid down before the act, and that there is no appeal beyond it — no truer interest sitting behind the one he holds, waiting to be discovered by someone cleverer or less deceived. To read a man is to read what he actually values, not to compute what he would value if he were the rational worker the theorist needs him to be. False consciousness is built entirely on the denial of this. Its whole content is that the worker's *real* interest — objective, class-given, knowable by the theorist — diverges from the interest he experiences himself as having, and that the gap between the two is the measure of his deception. The instant you posit an interest truer than the one a man holds, and propose to read it off his structural position over his own head, you have left the method and joined the people who believe they can know a heart better than the heart's owner. The method's first caveat is precisely a refusal of that posture. The Jew's interest is to be a good Jew and to keep his community, because that is what he values; it is not a worker-interest he is too benighted to perceive, and there is no one entitled to tell him it is.

The third thing is the *self under the self*, and because it is the deepest and the whole of the next part is given to it, it need only be named here. False consciousness requires that beneath the self a person consciously has — the Catholic, the German, the Jew, with his actual loyalties and loves — there lie a truer self, the rational worker, temporarily veiled, so that the work of liberation is to lift the veil and let the true self stand forth. The method denies the architecture. It holds that formation goes all the way down, that there is no veiled rational self beneath the formed one because the formed one is the only self there is, and that to strip the formation is therefore not

to uncover a free man but to unmake the man. These three refusals — bracket the truth, read the value, deny the self beneath — are one refusal seen from three sides, and together they are the exact negation of false consciousness rather than a repainting of it. The method describes the same machine Marx described and draws the opposite conclusion about the people in it: not that they are deceived creatures with a true self to be freed, but that they are whole persons, formed as all persons are formed, whose beliefs and loyalties are genuinely theirs and are not yours to strip away for their own good.

PART 3

The Self That Was Never There

> *That false consciousness is an error theory and stands or falls on a particular picture of the self — a true, rational self lying beneath the formed one, veiled by the institutions of an unjust order, so that liberation is the lifting of the veil; that the term was coined not by Marx but by Engels, once, in 1893, and built by later Marxists into the floor beneath the whole structure; and that the framework denies the picture at its root, because formation does not lie over a self like a veil over a face — it goes all the way down, and is the self, the values a person weighs by and the field of what he can see and the community he turns to for how to live, so there is no rational worker beneath the Jew to uncover, and the veil, lifted, reveals not a free man but no man at all*

THE DOCTRINE THAT HOLDS THE WHOLE STRUCTURE UP rests on a single picture of the human self, and once that picture is set out plainly its fragility is visible, which is why the Marxist tradition tends to leave it unstated. The picture is this: that a person has, at bottom, a true and rational self, whose interests are given by his real position in the world; and that over this true self the institutions of an unjust order lay a false one, a costume of identity — nation, faith, race, craft — which fits so closely and is worn so long that the person mistakes it for his skin. Liberation, on this picture, is an unveiling. The false self is stripped away, the institutions that stitched it are torn down, and the true rational self beneath, which was there all along, stands forth at last and goes free. Everything in the Marxist account of emancipation depends on this picture, because without a true

SELF BENEATH THE FALSE ONE THERE IS NOTHING FOR THE UNveiling to reveal and nothing for the revolution to free.

It is worth pausing on how thin the textual ground for this is, because the weight placed on it is enormous. The term *false consciousness* was never used by Marx at all. It appears once in the whole corpus of the founders, in a private letter Engels wrote to Franz Mehring in July 1893, a decade after Marx's death, and Engels meant by it something narrower and more careful than what it became — that a thinker may work out an ideology in good faith while the real forces moving him stay hidden from him, so that his reasoning, sincere as it is, runs with motives he cannot see. That is a remark about the opacity of one's own motivation, and a sane one. What it became, in the hands of Lukács and the theorists of the 1920s who built it into the floor of the whole edifice, was something far larger and far more dangerous: a verdict that whole classes hold a systematically false picture of themselves and their interests, and that the theorist, standing outside the deception, can see the true picture they cannot. The slender Engels remark was loaded with a burden it was never built to carry — the burden of licensing one set of people to overrule another set about who they really are. And the burden is borne, in the end, entirely by the picture of the self under the self.

The framework denies that picture at its root, and the denial is the hinge of this whole paper. Formation, in the framework, is not a veil laid over a self; it is the self, made. When the foundational papers say that an order forms its people, they do not mean that it paints a false surface over a true interior. They mean that it builds the interior — that the values by which a person weighs every choice, the field of what he is able to see and what lies forever past his horizon, the very sense of what a good life is and what a good person does, are installed in the course of his formation and are, when it is finished, simply him. There is no earlier, truer self that the formation covered over, because before the formation there was no self at all, only the raw human capacity that every formation works upon. The Jewishness of

the Jew is not a costume over a worker. It is the benefit column from which he weighs every good — the Sabbath weighed against the wage, the child's education weighed against the cost, the whole shape of what is worth doing. It is the field of the visible through which he sees the world — what counts to him as a duty, as a desecration, as a life well lived. It is the community he turns to when he does not know how to act, the rabbi he asks, the tradition he consults. Strip all of that away and you have not revealed the rational worker who was hiding underneath. There was no one underneath. There was only the man you have just unmade, standing in the space where his self used to be.

This is where the framework's other foundational work bears directly, because the claim that formation goes all the way down is not an assertion of taste but a structural finding the project has built up across its papers. The account of the machine shows that an order rules most cheaply not by force but by forming its people, and that a deeply formed person does not experience the order's values as an external imposition but as his own deepest convictions — which means the values are genuinely his, not a film over some other set he would hold if he could. The account of the cognitive architecture shows why this formation takes so completely and so early: that the human mind is built to receive its frameworks in childhood, before it can evaluate them, and to hold what it received not as a hypothesis it might revise but as the plain furniture of reality. Put the two together and the picture of the veiled true self becomes not merely unproven but incoherent. There is no layer of the person that formation did not reach, because the layers a liberator would point to as the "true self" — the capacity to reason, to choose, to value — are themselves furnished by formation, filled with content by it, given their very standards of what counts as reasonable and choiceworthy by it. A self stripped of all formation is not a free rational worker. It is not a self at all. The rational worker beneath the Jew is not hidden. He does not exist, and never did, and the doctrine that he does is

the most consequential fiction in the history of modern politics — because, as the next part shows by the most painful possible instance, men have killed for the freeing of him, and what they freed was no one, and what they destroyed was everything the people they came to save had.

PART 4

The Jew in the Rubble

> *That the whole argument can be put as a single scene — the liberator who has killed the rabbis and razed the synagogues, telling a Jew he is free now, no longer a Jew but a rational worker delivered from his oppressors; and the Jew, who answers that he is a Jew, that it is what he is, that the man has destroyed his community and killed the ones he turned to for how to live, and asks how that has freed him; that his answer is not false consciousness failing to lift but accurate testimony the theory cannot hear; and that this scene is not a thought experiment but a thing that was done, in the 1920s, by the Yevsektsiya, in the name of freeing the Jewish worker — whom it freed, and who despised it*

The whole of the argument can be carried by a single scene, and it is worth staging it in full, because the abstractions of the foregoing parts become unanswerable the moment they are put into a particular human mouth. Imagine the liberation accomplished. The vanguard has done its work: it has killed the rabbis or driven them underground, torn down the synagogues or turned them into clubs, closed the schools where the children learned the law, abolished the communal institutions through which the people governed their own affairs. And now the liberator comes to an ordinary Jew — not a rabbi, not a notable, just a man — and delivers the good news. *You are free now. You are no longer a Jew; that was never really what you were. You were an oppressed worker, kept in chains of superstition by a clerical and merchant class who fed on you, suffering from a false consciousness that taught you to love your own cage. I, the vanguard, have done for you what you could not do for yourself. I have killed*

YOUR OPPRESSORS AND DESTROYED THE INSTITUTIONS THAT blinded you. Now that your mind is clear and rational, go and coordinate with your fellow workers, build your collective, sit on your governing boards, and be a free and happy and rational man.

And the Jew answers. *I am no longer a Jew? But I am a Jew. It is what I am. And you have just destroyed my community. You have killed the men I went to when I did not know how to live — when I needed to know what was right, how to be a good father, how to bury my own father, how to be a good Jew. They are dead and their houses are rubble and their books are burned. How is that freeing me?* There is the whole refutation, in a frightened and entirely sane human voice. The liberator has a theory that says this man's answer is the false self talking — that the attachment to community and rabbi and law is exactly the false consciousness the liberation was meant to cure, and that the distress is withdrawal from the drug, to be pushed through rather than heeded. But strip the theory away and look at what the man is actually reporting, and it is not a symptom. It is a true description of his situation. He has not been freed. He has been bereaved. The self the liberator was sure lay underneath — the rational worker who would step out of the rubble grateful and clear-eyed — has not stepped out, because he was never in there. What stepped out is a man whose world has been destroyed, correctly saying so.

The structural name for what has been done to him is the cutting of his seam. The project's account of the division of knowing holds that no person can verify or work out for himself more than a sliver of what he lives by, and that he therefore depends, necessarily, on an interpreter class he trusts for the rest — the people who hold and read the knowledge he cannot hold and read alone, and to whom he turns precisely when his own resources run out. For this man, the rabbis were that seam. They were the ones he consulted when the question was too hard for him: how to live, how to mourn, what the law required of him in a case he had never met. To kill them is not to

remove a parasite standing between him and a clarity he would otherwise have. It is to sever the connection through which he reached everything he could not reach by himself, and to leave him not freer but stranded — in possession, now, of a freedom to work out from scratch, alone, every question his tradition had spent three thousand years working out for him, which is not a freedom any actual human being has the resources to use. The liberator imagines he has struck off a chain. He has cut a lifeline, and called the drowning that follows emancipation.

This is not a thought experiment. It was done, in detail, in the first decade of the Soviet state, and the agency that did it states the case more clearly than any invented scene could. The Yevsektsiya — the Jewish sections of the Communist Party, established in 1918 with Lenin's sanction and active until 1930 — existed to carry the Party's ideology and its militant atheism to the Jewish masses, and its premise was exactly the premise this paper attacks. Lenin himself held that the Jews were not a living nation at all, and that their assimilation was the progressive solution to what was called the Jewish question — which is to say, in the vocabulary of this argument, that Jewishness was a false self, a relic to be dissolved, and that the true self underneath was the worker who would emerge once the relic was cleared away. On that premise the Yevsektsiya acted, and the record of what it did is precise: it liquidated the kehillot, the elected communal bodies through which Jews had governed their own affairs for centuries; it confiscated and closed the synagogues, some six hundred and fifty of them across the 1920s, turning them into workers' clubs and anti-religious museums and warehouses; it shut the chadarim and the yeshivot where the children and the young men learned; it banned the teaching of Hebrew; it prosecuted rabbis; and it staged, in Vitebsk in 1922 and Kiev in 1923, public show-trials of Judaism itself, held pointedly on the High Holy Days, with Party operatives playing the prosecutors and the institutions of Jewish life arraigned in the dock. All of it was done in the name of freeing the

Jewish worker from the clerical and bourgeois oppressors who, on the theory, had manufactured his Jewishness to keep him enslaved.

Two facts about the Yevsektsiya complete the argument, and they are the facts the theory cannot absorb. The first is who its members were. They were, overwhelmingly, Jews — many of them former Bundists, socialists who had themselves been raised in Jewish formation and had, in the study circles of their youth, converted, exchanged one benefit column for another, and come out the far side believing that the formation they had left was a prison their unconverted kinsmen were still inside. They are the vanguard in its purest specimen, and they are also the living proof of the project's separate finding that a revolutionary is made not by a class waking into consciousness but by individual conversion, one collision at a time — the makers of the war on Jewish life were themselves made not as a class but one defected Jew at a time, each convinced he could see the true interest his brothers could not. The second fact is how they were received by the people they came to free. They were despised. The bulk of Russian Jewry regarded the Yevsektsiya, in one historian's summary, with the contempt reserved for renegades who turn persecutor against their own — and there is the empirical refutation of the whole doctrine, lying in the historical record. If false consciousness were real, the freeing of it would have been felt, sooner or later, as a liberation; the scales would have fallen, the rational worker would have thanked his liberators. Instead the freed experienced the freeing exactly as the man in the staged scene experiences it — as the destruction of their world by renegades — and said so, and were not believed, because the theory had already classified their testimony as the symptom it was curing. The Jew in the rubble was telling the truth. The vanguard could not hear him, because its premise was that his truth was his disease.

PART 5

The Vanguard's Borrowed Sight

> *That once the self beneath the self is gone, the vanguard loses the whole of its standing, because its licence to act for the worker over his objection rested on the two things now removed — that the worker has a true interest he cannot see, and that the vanguard can; that Lenin conceded the first, holding the workers reach by their own effort only trade-union consciousness and that the rest must be brought from without, and Lukács supplied the second, lodging the consciousness proper to the class in the Party that bears it; and that with the true self gone the vanguard is revealed as a faction with its own formation, not a seer freeing a hidden self but a power capturing the seam through which a people's beliefs are kept, and calling the capture freedom*

If there is no true self beneath the formed one, the vanguard does not merely lose an argument; it loses its reason to exist, and the swiftness of the collapse is worth following, because the vanguard is the part of the structure that did the killing. Its entire claim to act for the worker — to lead him where he would not go, to overrule him when he resisted, to tear down the institutions he loved — rested on two propositions and no others. The first was that the worker has a true interest he cannot see. The second was that the vanguard can see it. Remove the true self and the first proposition falls, because there is no truer interest behind the one the worker holds for the vanguard to be right about; and when the first falls the second is left describing nothing, a faculty of perception trained on an object that is not there. What is left, once both are gone, is a

body of people overruling other people about how to live, with no remaining warrant except their own conviction that they know best — which is to say, a faction, exercising power.

It is striking how much of this the tradition conceded in its own voice, if one reads it without piety. Lenin, in the founding text of the vanguard idea, granted the first proposition in terms more candid than his followers have been comfortable with since. The working class, he wrote, is able by its own effort to develop only what he called trade-union consciousness — the awareness that it must combine, bargain, and press for better terms within the existing order — and never, of itself, the revolutionary consciousness that would carry it beyond that order. That consciousness, he said plainly, would have to be brought to the workers from without, and the bringers he named were the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intelligentsia, to which, he noted, Marx and Engels themselves had belonged. Read that admission for what it says. It says that the consciousness on whose behalf the whole revolution is to be made does not arise in the class whose consciousness it is supposed to be. It is an import, carried in from outside by men who are not workers, and installed. Lenin presents this as a practical necessity; but it is a confession that the "true consciousness" of the proletariat is not the proletariat's at all. It is the intelligentsia's, attributed to the proletariat, and then enforced in the proletariat's name.

Lukács, building the theory out a generation later, supplied the matching half and made the structure explicit. The consciousness that mattered, in his account, was not the actual, empirical consciousness of actual workers — which was admittedly shot through with the false kind — but the consciousness rationally appropriate to the proletariat's position, the consciousness it *would* have if it fully grasped its situation. And since real workers did not in fact have this imputed consciousness, it had to reside somewhere, in some bearer that could hold it on the class's behalf and act

from it; and that bearer was the Party. Set Lenin's half beside Lukács's and the whole machine stands assembled: the true consciousness is not the workers' own, it is brought from without by the intelligentsia, and it is held for them by the Party, which is therefore entitled to act as the class even against the actual wishes of the actual members of the class — because the actual members, with their actual wishes, are precisely the ones suffering from the false consciousness the Party has transcended. The Party is the true self the workers lack, externalised and armed. And the logic, once running, does not stop at the class, because the same move can be made again, one level down: if the Party can stand in for the class, the Central Committee can stand in for the Party, and in the end one man can stand in for the Central Committee — the substitution Trotsky named and then was destroyed by, the party replacing the class, the committee the party, the leader the committee, each step licensed by the same original claim that the true interest lives not where the people are but where the knowers are.

Strip the doctrine of its own self-description and what is the vanguard actually doing? The project's foundational papers have the answer ready, because the vanguard is a case of something they already named. A people's beliefs are kept and reproduced at a chokepoint — the seam, the interpreter class through which the things they cannot verify for themselves reach them. The rabbis were such a seam; so were the priests, the scholars, the elders. The vanguard's whole programme is to destroy that seam and put itself in the vacated seat: to kill or silence the existing interpreters, raze the institutions through which they worked, and install itself as the sole authorised reader of reality, the new and only place from which the people may learn what is true and how to live. This is not liberation from the seam; the seam cannot be abolished, because the division of knowing is permanent and a people will always depend on *some* interpreter for what they cannot reach alone. It is *capture* of the seam — the replacement of a plural, customary, slow-grown interpretive order, in which no single authority

owned the whole of a people's mind, by a single one that does, and that holds it by force. The foundational account of the machine warned of exactly this figure: the one who razes the plural interpreters and stands alone in the seat he has emptied, more dangerous than any of the rivals he cleared away because nothing now stands between him and the people's belief. The vanguard is that figure wearing the robe of emancipation. And the final irony, the one that dissolves the last of its pretension, is that the vanguard could never have been the impartial liberator it imagined even in principle, because it too has a position and a formation — its doctrine drawn in a particular study circle, its benefit column loaded with the particular goods of the revolutionary life, its field of the visible drawn by Marx and Lenin as surely as the rabbi's was drawn by the Talmud. It does not stand outside all formation, correcting the formed from a view from nowhere. There is no view from nowhere, and the vanguard least of all occupies it. It is one formation making war on another, and the war's prize is the seam.

PART 6

Berlin's Door

> *That this whole argument was made, in a different vocabulary, by Isaiah Berlin, who saw that the danger lives in a particular doorway: the moment one posits a rational higher self distinct from the empirical self a person actually is, one has built the room in which all coercion can be called freedom, because the empirical self's every refusal can be read as the lower self resisting its own liberation, and overridden in the higher self's name; that this is Rousseau's man forced to be free, and that the gap between the two selves is not an incidental feature of the doctrine but the exact space in which the terror lives; and that the atrocities of the vanguard century were therefore not betrayals of the theory by wicked men but the theory's own logic, followed where it leads*

THE ARGUMENT OF THIS PAPER IS NOT NEW, THOUGH THE framework it is built on is; its philosophical core was stated with great clarity by Isaiah Berlin in 1958, and it is worth passing through his version, because Berlin saw precisely where the danger enters and named the doorway. Berlin distinguished two ideas of liberty. Negative liberty is freedom *from* — the absence of others' interference, the space within which a person may act unobstructed. Positive liberty is freedom *to* — self-mastery, the condition of being one's own master, governed by one's own reason rather than driven by one's lower impulses. Berlin had no quarrel with the bare desire for self-mastery; the quarrel was with what happens to it when it is built upon a particular picture of the self, and the picture is the very one this paper has been dismantling. For self-mastery requires a self that masters and a self that is mastered, and the positive tradition supplied them by

SPLITTING THE PERSON IN TWO: A HIGHER, RATIONAL, TRUE SELF, and a lower, empirical, everyday self — the self a person actually is, with his actual wants and attachments. To be free, on this account, is for the higher self to rule the lower.

Berlin saw what follows, and it follows with terrible smoothness. Once the person is split this way, coercion of the empirical self can be redescribed as liberation of the rational self. If your true freedom lies in the rule of your higher self, and your lower self — the one doing the wanting and the refusing — stands in the way, then constraining your lower self is not a violation of your freedom but its fulfilment, even, Berlin noted, where the empirical self opposes the constraint with all its might. And then comes the move he identified as the final humiliation: the person is told that what is being done to him is not coercion at all, because it is increasing his real freedom. The man who says *but I do not want this* is answered that his not-wanting is exactly the unfreedom being cured, that his true self wants it even as his false self screams, and that the screaming is the disease and the constraint the medicine. This is Rousseau's notorious formula, that a man may be forced to be free — and Berlin's point, the whole point, is that the formula is not an aberration that careless tyrants stumbled into, but the direct and almost inevitable consequence of taking the divided self seriously. Posit the true self under the empirical one, and you have built, in that single metaphysical move, the entire justifying apparatus of benevolent tyranny. Everything after is detail.

Lay Berlin's analysis over the vanguard and the fit is exact, line for line. The rational higher self is the worker; the empirical lower self is the Jew, the Catholic, the peasant — the man as he actually is, with his actual loves. The false consciousness is Berlin's lower self mistaking itself for the whole. The vanguard is the agency that rules the lower self in the higher self's name. And the Jew's protest in the rubble — *but I am a Jew, it is what I am, how is this freeing me* — is precisely the empirical self opposing its liberation with

all its might, and being told that its protest is the very false consciousness the liberation is curing, that its true self thanks the liberator even as the false self weeps. The gap Berlin identified, between the real self and the empirical self, is not a flaw at the edge of the doctrine. It is the room in which the whole terror lives, because every act of force against the actual human being can be relocated, by means of that gap, into an act of service to the human being he really is. There is no possible protest from the empirical self that the doctrine cannot reinterpret as confirmation, because the louder the actual man objects, the more deeply deceived his false self must be, and the more urgently the liberation must be pressed. The doctrine is unfalsifiable from the inside, and it is unfalsifiable in the most dangerous possible way: by converting the victim's every cry of pain into further evidence that the cure is working.

This is why the catastrophes of the vanguard century must not be written off, as they so often are, as betrayals of a noble theory by wicked or corrupt men — as though the idea were sound and only its executors failed it. Berlin's analysis, and this paper's, says the opposite: the catastrophes are the theory's own logic, followed where it leads. Grant the true self under the false one, grant that the knower can see it and the man cannot, grant that the man's resistance is the false self defending its prison, and the camp follows not as a corruption of the premise but as its consistent application. It was no accident, Berlin observed, that the lineage running through Rousseau and the divided self issued in Robespierre, nor that the lineage running through Marx issued in Stalin; the men who emptied the cities of Cambodia to free the peasant from the parasite city, the men who starved the villages to break the false consciousness of the kulak, the men who closed the synagogues to free the Jewish worker from his rabbi — these were not deviations from the doctrine of false consciousness and the true self it serves. They were that doctrine in power, doing what the doctrine licenses, hearing in every scream the proof that the patient was not yet cured. The

horror is held here with its full weight, and it is held as legible, not as excused: it became possible the moment a self was posited under the self, and a class of men appointed to free it over the protests of the men who actually existed. The doorway Berlin found is the doorway the whole century walked through, and it was built, every time, out of the same fiction — the man underneath, who was not there.

PART 7

The Honest Objection

> *That the strongest case against this paper is not crude false consciousness but the subtler problem of adaptive preference — the contented slave, the person so long deprived he has trimmed his wants to fit his cage and reports himself satisfied — and that if the method will not call this false consciousness, is it not just letting oppression hide behind the words "that is what he values"; that the method grants the difficulty, and grants that horizons are drawn, but answers with a line it will not cross: the difference between imputing a man's interest and acting on it for him, the vanguard's crime, and widening what he can see and returning the choice to him, the only honest thing anyone may do; so the test is whether an intervention gives a man more to see and choose, or destroys what he has and installs another's choice — offer the union, never burn the cheder*

The argument so far has had an easy time of it, because the vanguard in its crude form is an easy target, and intellectual honesty requires turning now to the strongest version of the other side, which is not crude at all. The serious objection does not come from the commissar who thinks the worker is a dupe. It comes from a careful and humane tradition that worries about something real: adaptive preference. People, this tradition observes, trim their wants to fit what they can get. The person born into deprivation, who has never seen another life and never expects to, may lower his expectations until they match his cage and then report himself content — and his contentment is genuine, and it is also, in some sense one cannot quite wave away, a product of the deprivation itself. The philosopher Jon Elster gave it the homely name of sour grapes, after the

FOX WHO, UNABLE TO REACH THE FRUIT, DECIDES IT MUST BE sour; and the capability theorists, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum chief among them, built a whole critique of preference-satisfaction around it, pointing out that a measure of well-being which simply asks people whether their wants are met will rate the contented slave as flourishing and the discontented free man as wretched, which is plainly wrong. And here the objection turns on this paper with real force. *You*, it says, *make everything turn on what a man actually values, read from his life. But his values were drawn for him — you say so yourself, with your field of the visible that his position fixes. If what he can want was installed by the very order that exploits him, then "that is what he values" is not the trump card you think it is. It is just oppression, speaking in the satisfied voice it taught him. Your refusal to look behind his stated wants to a deeper interest is not respect. It is abandonment dressed as humility.*

This is the objection that has to be answered straight, because it is partly right, and the method does not gain by pretending otherwise. It is true that horizons are drawn. The whole framework insists on it: a person's position fixes the field of what he can see, formation installs what he will count as good, and there are people whose horizon has been drawn so narrowly that they cannot want what they have never been shown and cannot miss what was never in their field. The method does not deny the contented slave. It grants him. What the method denies is not the diagnosis but the prescription — not that horizons are drawn, but that the drawnness of a man's horizon licenses someone else to override his choices on the strength of a truer interest read off his structural position. And the line between those two responses is the whole of the matter, because it is the line between the capability tradition at its best and the vanguard at its worst, and they are not the same thing, though the crude objection runs them together.

There are exactly two things one can do about a horizon one believes has been drawn too narrowly, and everything depends on which. The first is to

impute to the person an interest he does not avow, declare it his true one, and act on it for him — lead him toward it, and where he resists, override the resistance as the false self speaking, and tear down whatever in his world holds the narrow horizon in place. This is the vanguard's move, and it is the move the method refuses absolutely, because it is precisely the positing of the self under the self, with all of Berlin's terror folded inside it. The second is to *widen what the person can see, and return the choice to him* — to put the alternative into his field where it was not before, show him the other life, the other way, the thing his position had kept from view, and then let him weigh it with his own values and abide by his weighing, even when he weighs it and chooses what you would not. This is the move the method requires, and it is, rightly understood, what the capability theorists are actually asking for: Sen's entire approach is built on expanding the real freedoms people have to do and to be — widening the set of lives genuinely open to them — and then, pointedly, leaving the choosing among those lives to them, not prescribing which functioning they must select. The serious adaptive-preference tradition, in other words, lands on the method's side of the line, not the vanguard's: its remedy for the narrowed horizon is to widen it, not to override the person whose horizon it is.

The test that separates the two responses is simple enough to carry into any actual case, and it is the practical heart of this paper. Ask of any intervention meant to help: does it give the person *more* to see and to choose from, or does it *destroy what he has and install someone else's choice in its place?* Build a school beside the cheder, and the child has two things in his field where he had one, and may choose; this widens. Open a union hall in the company town, and the worker has an alternative source of standing and support he lacked, and may use it or not; this widens. Bring the vote, the free press, the road out, the second opinion — all of these put things into a person's field that his position had withheld, and leave the weighing to him; all of these the method blesses without reservation, because they are the

enlargement of the field, which is the only honest power anyone has over another's mind. But burn the cheder, kill the rabbi, close the synagogue, and you have not widened the man's field; you have demolished what was in it and left him with the single option you preferred, which is not choice but its abolition. Offer the union; never burn the cheder. The first trusts the man to weigh a wider world; the second decides you may weigh it for him because his weighing cannot be trusted — and that distrust, the conviction that a man's own valuing of his own life may be set aside by someone who knows his interest better, is the seed from which every horror in this paper grew. The method's answer to the contented slave is therefore not to leave him in his contentment, which would be the abandonment the objection charges; it is to break open his field, show him every door his cage had hidden, and then — this is the part the vanguard cannot abide — to let him choose, and to honour the choice, even if, shown the wider world entire, he looks at it and decides that what he had was, to him, worth keeping. That decision is his to make, because it is his life and his self and his values doing the weighing; and the day you decide it is yours to make for him is the day you have walked through Berlin's door.

PART 8

Following the Surplus, and Who Really Cares for the Poor

> *That dropping the premise costs the indictment of exploitation nothing, because exploitation can be shown by following the surplus factually — naming what the order takes, how much, by what mechanism — and letting a man weigh, with his own values, whether his community is worth its price, where the Marxist insists he values it only because deceived; that genuine care for the poor therefore requires abandoning the premise, because the premise is what licenses destroying the things the poor actually live by, and the twentieth century is the itemised bill; that the honest left widens the field and returns the choice while the disastrous left imputes the interest and acts for the man; and that the final test of any liberation is whether the man it freed says he is free — so when the Jew in the rubble says he has been bereaved, believe him*

It might be feared that to give up the premise is to give up the critique of exploitation along with it — that without a true interest the worker is failing to perceive, there is no leverage left to condemn the order that grinds him, and the method collapses into a complacent acceptance of whatever is. The fear is unfounded, and seeing why completes the argument. The method gives up not one inch of the indictment of exploitation; it only changes the ground on which the indictment stands, from an imputed interest to a followed fact. You do not need to tell a man

HE HAS A TRUE INTEREST HE CANNOT SEE IN ORDER TO SHOW HIM he is being robbed. You follow the surplus. You name, in figures where the record allows, what the order takes from the people who produce it: the share of the harvest that goes to the lord, the hours that go to the owner, the rent and the tithe and the tribute and the interest, the exact mechanism by which what the many make ends in the hands of the few. This is the work the project's extraction modules do in every case study, and it requires no theory of false consciousness whatever, because it is not a claim about what is hidden in the worker's head; it is a claim about where the wealth goes, established from the evidence, and laid before the worker as fact. And then — this is the whole difference — you let him weigh it. You show him the price his arrangement exacts, fully and honestly, and you leave him to decide, by his own values, whether what he gets for it, including the community and the meaning and the belonging that the arrangement also carries, is worth what it costs him. The Marxist cannot bear to leave the weighing to him, because the Marxist is certain in advance how it must come out and treats any other answer as proof of deception. The method leaves him the weighing, because it is his life being weighed, and the price and the worth are both, in the end, his to reckon.

From this follows the claim that gives this paper its sharpest edge, and it is addressed precisely to those who believe themselves the friends of the poor. If you genuinely care about workers and poor people — not about History, not about the revolution, not about the beautiful rational future, but about the actual human beings who are poor — then you are obliged to abandon the premise, not despite your care but because of it. For the premise is exactly the thing that licenses the destruction of what the poor actually have. It is the false-consciousness doctrine that lets a man with a theory look at a poor man's faith, his family, his community, his church or his synagogue or his mosque, the whole web of meaning by which he bears a hard life, and call it a prison to be demolished for his own good. The poor,

more than anyone, live by the things the premise marks for destruction, because the things the premise marks for destruction — community, tradition, the institutions of mutual meaning and mutual aid — are very often all the poor have that the rich cannot take, the one wealth that is theirs. And the twentieth century is the itemised bill for the premise, written in the only currency that finally counts. It was not the friends of capital who emptied Cambodia and starved Ukraine and closed the synagogues of Vitebsk; it was men who were entirely sincere that they were freeing the poor, acting out the logic of the true self and the false, certain that the screaming was the cure taking hold. If you cannot look at that bill and conclude that the theory which ran it up is a false premise to build on, then it is worth asking whether it is really the poor you care about, or the theory.

So the division this paper draws is finally a division within the left itself, between two ways of meaning the same good intention, and the method comes down without hesitation on one side of it. There is a left that widens the field and returns the choice — that builds the union and the school and the free press and the independent base, that puts more into the reach of the poor and trusts them to weigh it, that fights exploitation by following the surplus and arming the exploited with sight and standing and exit, and then abides by what they choose even when they choose their God over the dialectic and their village over the collective. And there is a left that imputes the interest and acts for the man — that knows in advance what the poor would want if they were not deceived, and proceeds to give it to them over their objection, razing what they live by to free the self they do not have. The first is the reformist conclusion this whole project keeps arriving at by every separate road: that the machine cannot be escaped, only built better or worse, and that the honest work is to widen what people can see and soften what the order takes, never to seize the seam and remake the people from it. The second is the road that was walked, again and again, into the camp. The

method keeps Marx's sociology and discards his epistemology, indicts the exploitation and refuses the liberation-by-demolition, because the one is true and the other built the terror. Debug the machine; do not, in the name of the man underneath, destroy the man on top of him, who is the only man there is.

The test of any liberation, in the end, is brutally simple, and the whole of this paper reduces to it. Ask the man it freed whether he is free. If he says yes — if, shown the wider world, he walks into it and is glad — then the liberation was real and the field was honestly widened. But if he stands in the rubble of what you destroyed for him and says that you have not freed him but bereaved him, that you killed the men he turned to and burned the world he lived by and left him with a freedom he did not ask for and cannot use, then believe him. Do not tell him his grief is the false self weeping. Do not classify his testimony as the symptom you are curing. He is not a deceived creature with a true self you can see and he cannot. He is a whole man, formed as every man is formed, reporting with perfect accuracy what has been done to him — and the doctrine that cannot hear him, that has an answer prepared for his every cry that turns the cry into more warrant for the knife, is the most dangerous fiction the modern world produced. There is no man underneath. There is only the man in front of you, and the beginning of caring for him is to believe what he tells you about his own life. It is held, like everything in this work, as tested, not revealed.

The Man Underneath is a companion piece in the Patterns of Power series, setting out the author's central divergence from Marx — that false consciousness, the class consciousness it is meant to explain, and the Leninist vanguard it licenses all rest on one false premise: a true rational self lying beneath a person's formation, waiting to be freed. Because formation goes all the way down and is the self, the vanguard that destroys a people's interpreters and institutions to liberate the worker beneath frees no one; it bereaves a man of the community he had and seizes the seam of his belief for itself. The textual

and historical record — false consciousness from Engels to Lukács, the vanguard from Lenin, the Yevsektsiya's war on Jewish communal life, and Berlin's critique of positive liberty — is drawn from the standard scholarship and verified. The framework is thomas J. Bryan's; the research, structure, and composition are Claude's. It holds its grave material with gravity, refuses to make the explained into the excused, and is offered — like the method it applies — as tested, not revealed.